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Activities of the Department of Public Information: news services

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The overarching goal of the news services subprogramme of the Department of Public Information remains the production of a broad range of news and information on the activities and priorities of the United Nations system and its timely delivery to the widest possible audience. In a rapidly changing media and information technology environment, the Department has adapted its products and enhanced its delivery systems to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of its clients in all regions of the world for text, audio, visual and photo products. While maintaining traditional forms of distribution, the Department has advanced the delivery of news and information about the United Nations through the Internet, a medium that continues to reach an ever-expanding audience around the globe.

The present report, prepared in response to General Assembly resolution 63/100 B, summarizes the key advances made by the Department during the period from July 2008 to February 2009 in promoting the work of the United Nations to the global audience through its news and media services.

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 63/100 B, the General Assembly took note of the report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Department of Public Information submitted for consideration by the Committee on Information at its thirtieth session and requested the Secretary-General to continue to report to the Committee on the activities of the Department.

2. In the same resolution, the General Assembly called on the Department to provide specific information on a number of its activities. The Bureau of the Committee on Information, which met in November 2008, advised the Department to present the requested information in three parts, in accordance with the three subprogrammes of the Department: strategic communications services, news services and outreach services. The present report, submitted for consideration by the Committee at its thirty-first session, addresses the news and media services provided by the Department of Public Information and incorporates such areas as United Nations Radio and Television, meetings coverage and press releases, the United Nations website, including the news portal, and services to the media. It also contains a section on the impact of the capital master plan on the Department's news and media services. Unless otherwise indicated, the present report covers the activities of the Department for the period from July 2008 to February 2009.

II. News services: a focus on timely delivery to the widest possible audience

3. The overarching goal of the news services programme of the Department remains the production of a broad range of news and information on the activities and priorities of the United Nations system and its timely delivery to the widest possible audience. In a rapidly changing media and information technology environment, the Department has adapted its products and enhanced its delivery systems as necessary to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of its clients in all regions of the world for text-based, audio, visual and photo products. In particular, while maintaining traditional forms of distribution, the Department has advanced the delivery of news and information about the United Nations through the Internet, a medium that continues to reach an ever-expanding audience around the globe.

1. United Nations Radio

4. United Nations Radio continues to harness new technologies to deliver news, features and programmes to a wider global audience. With newly programmed websites, United Nations Radio now provides more frequently updated content to its worldwide clients, serving in one capacity as an audio news service that delivers sound bites and short news reports/bulletins, and in another as a provider of in-depth features and magazine programmes.

5. The more frequent updating during the day of news on the actions of the General Assembly and Security Council, or on developments away from Headquarters, has proved particularly popular with broadcast partners. Distribution through the Internet means that United Nations Radio clients can receive more timely material through MP3 files that deliver much better audio quality than

traditional telephone distribution. The sound bites and short news pieces or features are easily placed and scheduled into the daily output of radio stations.

6. The Chinese, Kiswahili, Portuguese and Spanish Language Units are now distributing all their content using the Internet. This delivery strategy allows for the better measurement of downloads, enabling United Nations Radio to continually evaluate the use of its material. All Language Units added new partners during 2008. The Spanish Radio Unit has seen a significant increase in new partners in Latin America, adding more than 60 during the reporting period; more than 80 new stations in Africa and Brazil have been downloading radio programming in Portuguese; the Kiswahili Radio Unit has added five new partners; and the Chinese Radio Unit has found new partners in Australia and the United States of America. To keep broadcasters informed, the Arabic, Kiswahili, Portuguese and Spanish Language Units send out e-mails calling attention to breaking news and stories of interest, thus alerting partners to flexible content they can place in their own programmes. As another service, some Language Units, such as the Chinese Unit, occasionally do live link-ups with partners to give them fresh updates on major news.

7. While placing strong emphasis on expanding the number of clients, United Nations Radio is also strengthening ties with its current partners. Not all stations can receive material via the Internet, and United Nations Radio continues to work closely with its partner stations to ensure that they receive material by traditional means where necessary.

8. United Nations Radio has continued to report on the broadest possible range of United Nations activities and issues; highlights of its coverage over the reporting period include:

(a) The High-level Meetings of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals and on Africa's Development Needs;

(b) The Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development to Review the Implementation of the Monterrey Consensus, held in Doha;

(c) The commemorative plenary meeting of the General Assembly devoted to the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

9. United Nations Radio also devoted an array of reports and special features to the issues of climate change, the food crisis, the subsequent global financial crisis and wider concerns related to economic and social development. In an effort to spotlight issues and crises that often go underreported, it produced a series of features in connection with the Department's project "Ten stories the world should hear more about".

2. United Nations Television

10. Ensuring access to United Nations news and information for the growing global television audience is another priority of the Department. United Nations Television provides live coverage of events at Headquarters that is accessed directly by major international television news agencies, including the Associated Press Television News (APTN), the Agence France-Presse and Reuters TV), as well as by a number of large broadcasting organizations.

11. The Department is also supplying global broadcasters with feature material on United Nations activities and issues. Through its two main series of programmes, the magazine show *21st Century* and the *UN in Action* series, the Department has highlighted priority themes and issues, including development, the eradication of poverty, peace and security, HIV/AIDS and human rights. Africa, a principal concern of the United Nations, was the subject of more than one third of the *UN in Action* output, for example, while more than one quarter of *21st Century* programmes dealt with environmental issues. The Department produced special videos for the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals, and, for the sixtieth anniversary of United Nations peacekeeping, a video entitled *In the cause of peace*, which is available in three languages.

12. An important dimension of the work of United Nations Television is its coordination with partners throughout the United Nations system, which is aimed at promoting a comprehensive and coordinated presentation of the work of the Organization. United Nations Television has cooperation agreements with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Department of Political Affairs, Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Population Fund, among many others, which help to generate story ideas and ensure the resources and access necessary for the generation of programming. In this way, United Nations Television acts as a "window to the world", highlighting United Nations success stories and issues that mass-media outlets would otherwise not cover.

3. United Nations Television programmes on YouTube

13. The proliferation of platforms for the delivery of video material through the Internet presents opportunities for the Department to reach new audiences, particularly young people. To that end, in 2008 the Department established a creative partnership with YouTube/Google, launching two new outlets for video material on the activities of the United Nations. The first is the United Nations channel on YouTube (www.youtube.com/unitednations), launched in August 2008. The channel is updated regularly with United Nations features and statements by the Secretary-General and other senior officials of the Organization. The channel also allows YouTube users to embed United Nations video into their own websites, thus expanding considerably the potential audience for United Nations videos highlighting major issues on the agenda of the Organization.

4. UNifeed

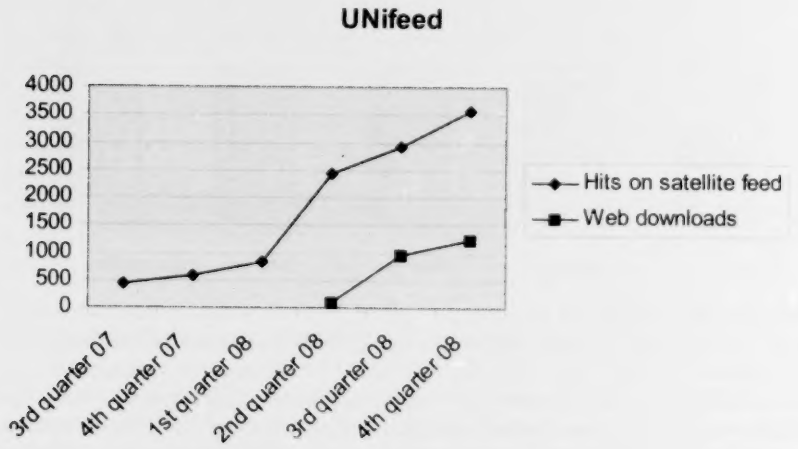
14. UNifeed was established in 2005 as an inter-agency platform to provide global television broadcasters with single-source access to video news stories from all members of the United Nations Communications Group. United Nations Television, UNICEF, the World Bank, United Nations peacekeeping operations and 19 other United Nations entities contribute to UNifeed, serving major national broadcasters in all regions, including Al-Jazeera, Al-Arabiya, BBC, CCTV, Channel NewsAsia, CNN, Deutsche Welle, Euronews, France 24, Russia Today, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), TVE (Spain) and TV5.

15. In 2008, UNifeed entered a new phase. In addition to distributing news stories on its 10-minute daily satellite feed via APTN, the European Broadcasting Union and Reuters, in June UNifeed launched a new website offering stories for download in broadcast-quality PAL and NTSC via the Internet. An outside web-hosting solution, procured through a combination of existing resources and a contribution from the World Bank, optimizes the use of bandwidth and reduces network bottlenecks resulting from data traffic congestion, allowing users to download large video files in a timely fashion.

16. The new website is expanding UNifeed's reach by serving additional media outlets that do not have access to the APTN feed, in particular smaller outlets and broadcasters in developing countries. For example, SABC uses the UNifeed website daily. Users affiliated with Al-Jazeera, African Caribbean Television, CNN, EFE (Spain), Gigacable radio (Mexico), IHA (Turkey), PBS, Reuters, SBS (Republic of Korea), USA Radio Network, 3A Telesud and TV Slovenija are among the website's top media users. This additional means of distribution, along with an expanded production and editing team at Headquarters, made possible through cooperation with other departments, now enables UNifeed to deliver news items throughout the day, as they become available. By the end of 2008, UNifeed was turning out more than 100 stories per month.

17. Teletrax, which monitors many (though not all) stations using UNifeed material via satellite, shows that UNifeed news stories aired at least 11,651 times in 2008, a fourfold increase over the previous year. In addition, 2,182 stories were downloaded in broadcast quality from the UNifeed website (see fig. I). Stations in some 57 countries across all continents, ranging from Austria and Bosnia and Herzegovina to the Russian Federation, China and India, Egypt and the Sudan, and Colombia and Mexico, are using UNifeed material.

Figure I



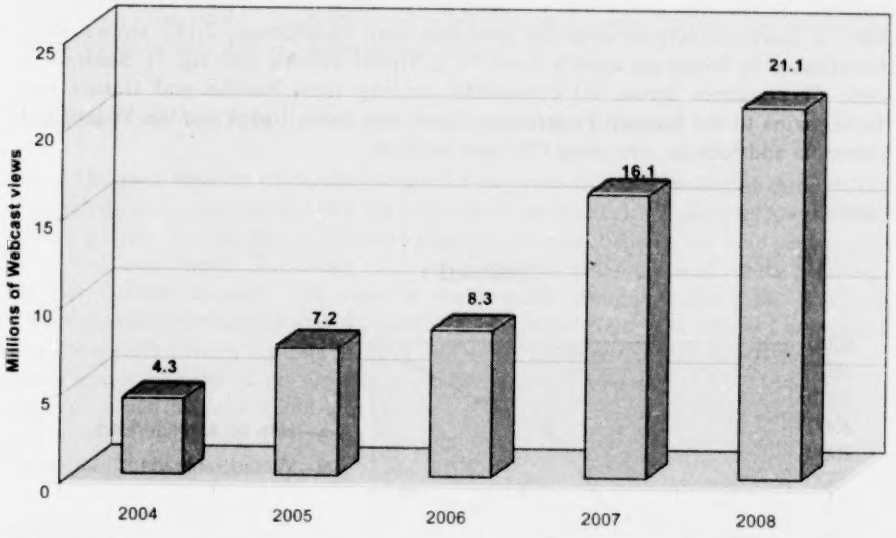
18. The packages that generated the most media pickup were those offering exclusive or breaking news coverage. Examples from the reporting period include stories from the ground in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti, the Sudan,

Zimbabwe and Gaza. Coverage of activities at United Nations Headquarters and carefully timed news features also generated high levels of media interest. Examples include coverage of Security Council meetings and press conferences on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Georgia, Somalia, the Sudan and Gaza; and news features produced for the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the XVII International AIDS Conference, held in Mexico, and the fourth anniversary of the tsunami in South Asia.

5. Webcasting

19. The growing importance and global reach of video via the Internet is reflected the audience for the Department's webcasting of activities at United Nations Headquarters and elsewhere. To capitalize on the synergies in the use of traditional broadcast and new media technologies, the United Nations Webcast Unit was relocated to the Television Section of the News and Media Division in January 2009, enhancing the Department's ability to deliver United Nations messages live and on demand on multiple platforms and devices.

Figure II
United Nations Webcast usage: 2004-2008



20. In 2008, the number of accesses to United Nations webcast material rose by more than 30 per cent, to some 21 million from some 16 million video views (live and on-demand) in 2007 (see fig. II). In total, 17,122 separate video clips were created in 2008. As users from over 200 countries and territories access video clips, webcasting reaches a truly global audience, demonstrating its effectiveness in bringing to viewers instant information and an awareness and a better understanding of the work of the Organization, as well as of the positions of individual Member States on various issues.

21. In addition to live and on-demand webcast coverage of Security Council and General Assembly meetings, press conferences, briefings and other meetings and events at United Nations Headquarters, the Department in 2008 provided webcast coverage of other United Nations conferences, including the twelfth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, held in Accra; the Financing for Development Conference, held in Doha; and the sixty-first annual conference of the Department of Public Information for non-governmental organizations, held in Paris. Furthermore, as it did in 2006 and 2007, in 2008 the Department provided live and on-demand webcast coverage (speaker by speaker) of all 11 sessions of the Human Rights Council, held in Geneva, including the universal periodic review and preparatory meetings for the Durban Review Conference. The cost of webcast coverage of the Human Rights Council was met, albeit with difficulty, within the existing resources of the Department, both in New York and Geneva, as well as through the voluntary contributions of Member States, which continue to be essential to ensure that complete and uninterrupted speaker-by-speaker coverage of all Human Rights Council sessions is provided.

6. Promoting multimedia products

22. The new web-hosting solution (see para. 15 above) has enabled the Department to improve the web delivery of photographs and audio, in addition to video. With server access points across the globe, the new platform ensures faster and more reliable access to radio and photo content. It has also helped to broaden the Department's geographical reach; tens of thousands of high-resolution photographs are now being downloaded by users in 135 countries, representing an exponential increase over previous usage. The additional storage capability of the web-hosting solution has enabled United Nations Radio sites to make available a vast archive of recent and historical audio programmes (see www.unmultimedia.org; click on UN Radio Classics).

23. In conjunction with the new web-hosting arrangement, this year the Department upgraded related web applications in order to obtain a wealth of useful statistical information on users and usage patterns. The Department's high-resolution photos are being used by press organizations, government agencies, educational institutions and non-governmental organizations; broadcast-quality audio files were downloaded by users in 118 countries during the reporting period; and the United Nations Television UNifeed video packages on the web were downloaded by partners and users in 57 countries. By analysing data such as the origin of requests and the level of demand for particular products and stories, the Department obtained more accurate information and improved its production planning.

7. Radio, television and photographic archives

24. The Department is entrusted with unique audio-visual materials consisting of approximately 55,000 hours of film and video recordings, 80,000 hours of audio recordings and 600,000 photographs documenting more than 63 years of the work of the Organization.

Box 1
United Nations Audiovisual Library of International Law

Together with the Office of Legal Affairs, the Department created and launched a unique library of audio-visual materials related to the evolution and codification of international law, including the essential role that the United Nations has played in advancing the rule of law. Throughout 2008, the Department retrieved and helped to digitize historical audio, photographs, film and video materials of legal relevance that constitute the core contents of the Office's website. The Department also produced 100 video lectures by internationally recognized experts in international law. The lectures, which cover a vast array of subjects, represent a priceless collection of legal thought and analysis from the world's leading scholars and practitioners. The historical archives project was launched in a ceremony held at United Nations Headquarters on 28 October 2008.

25. In anticipation of the capital master plan, the Department of Public Information used funds from the associated costs monies made available to outsource the digitization of the legacy United Nations photo collection (215,000 slides and negatives), so that the full collection can be safely kept in and retrieved from servers, which will prevent loss or damage during the capital master plan construction period. The Department is continuing to seek additional funding for the digitization and cataloguing of the corresponding photo captions. At the same time, it is making every effort to digitize its unique audio material. The branded UN Radio Classics is one of the favourite offerings on the multimedia website, with 1,412 downloads from 65 countries during the period from July to December 2008.

26. Because of the impending capital master plan, the Department is conducting a detailed and complete inventory, appraisal and selection of the audio-visual collection to support its effective digitization and relocation off-site. The identification work is being done with the assistance of specialized archivists who have been temporarily engaged. The Department will ensure that its audio-visual archives are preserved and made accessible to future generations.

Box 2
Feedback

Television stories produced by the Department of Public Information and broadcast to the global audience are continuously monitored both through feedback from broadcasters and through statistics gathered by Teletrax, a global monitoring system. Examples of the feedback received by the Department from television stations include:

- "Excellent monthly programme" (Israel Broadcasting Authority)
- "Thank you for your great work" (Canal Futura, Brazil)
- "Delivery is excellent and on time" (BBC, United Kingdom)

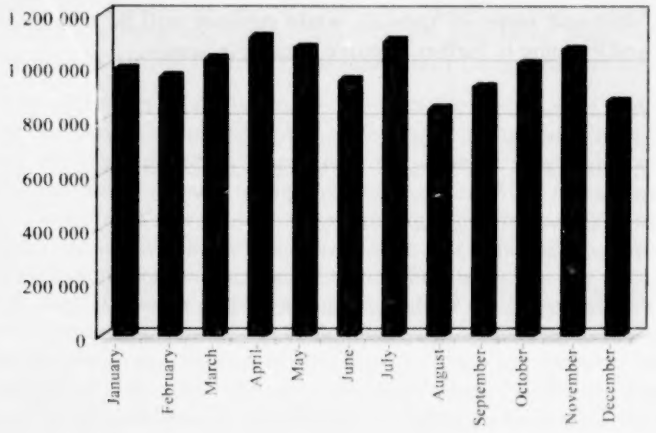
8. United Nations News Centre

27. The United Nations News Centre, long one of the most popular portals on the United Nations website, attracted an average of nearly one million unique visitors per month in 2008, with spikes during peak news periods (see fig. III). The redesigned site's accessibility and interactive elements have resulted in a broader audience reach, further demonstrating the effectiveness of the Internet in reaching a global audience with timely news on United Nations affairs. The redesigned version of the site is currently available in English and French, and the Department is continuing to work on similar redesigns in other official languages.

28. New features of the United Nations News Centre introduced in 2008 include the "Newsmakers" segment, launched in November, in which senior United Nations officials are interviewed about issues prominent in the news. The first interview featured the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Alain Le Roy, speaking on the situation in Darfur and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In December, at the onset of the crisis in Gaza, an interview was conducted with the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, Karen AbuZayd, which provided a first-hand account of the humanitarian situation there at a time when on-the-ground coverage was limited. Another new feature has provided regular photo stories on issues in the news, including, in December, "Year in Review 2008: Pictures from the UN".

29. Other forms of news distribution featured on the United Nations News Centre, such as Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds, also enjoyed steady growth. The number of subscribers to the associated e-mail news alerts service continued to grow, reaching 55,000 (English and French) by mid-2008. However, continuing technical issues have affected the service and its expansion to all official languages. The Department, together with the Office of Information and Communications Technology, continued to explore ways and means of resolving those problems, which will require a significant upgrading of the technical underpinning of the service.

Figure III
English News Centre: monthly visits in 2008



9. Press releases

30. The Internet, as well as distribution directly to media at Headquarters and to other regions through the United Nations information centres (UNICs), is crucial to the Department's continued ability to provide fast, accurate, balanced and comprehensive coverage of all open intergovernmental meetings and press conferences at Headquarters and at other locations. Between July 2008 and January 2009, the Department's meetings-coverage operation produced a total of 2,482 press releases, with 13,357 pages in English and French, including end-of-year round-ups of Security Council and General Assembly actions. That output, made available in hard copy at Headquarters and distributed to worldwide audiences via the Internet and United Nations information centres, included:

(a) 430 press releases on meetings coverage summaries for the sixty-third regular session of the General Assembly, from mid-September to December 2008;

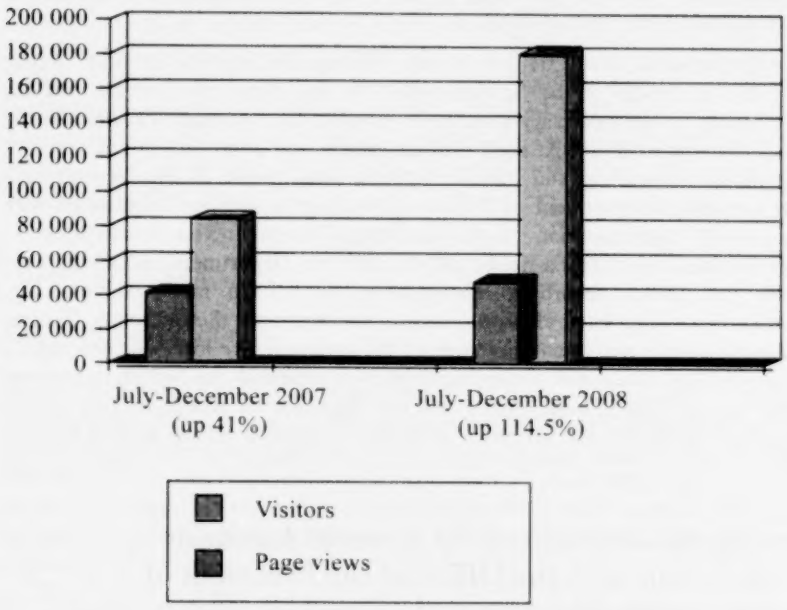
(b) 238 press releases on the Security Council, including on several late-night and weekend meetings on Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Georgia, the Middle East and the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur;

(c) More than 700 press releases on statements by and messages from the Secretary-General and the Deputy Secretary-General, as well as on material from other United Nations offices and departments;

(d) 249 summaries of press briefings of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General at Headquarters.

31. There was also a significant increase in access to the press releases on the United Nations website. The period from July to December 2008 saw a 114 per cent increase in the number of page views over the same period in 2007, from 84,400 to 181,000 (see figure IV). In order to further improve service and delivery to its clients, the Department is in the process of implementing a newly structured website and a sophisticated database search function, resulting in part from comments and suggestions collected in surveys and group discussions with delegations from Member States and representatives of the media and non-governmental organizations — key users of United Nations meetings coverage summaries and press releases. The search function, for example, will enable users to search by keyword, topic, date and name of speaker, while releases will be displayed both chronologically and by topic to further improve document access.

Figure IV
United Nations meetings coverage/press release website



III. Liaison with the Executive Office of the Secretary-General and the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General

32. The Department works on a systematic and daily basis with both the Executive Office of the Secretary-General and the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General to ensure coherent and coordinated messaging on United Nations issues. Senior officials of the Department meet every morning with colleagues from both Offices and relevant departments to review developments that have occurred over the past 24 hours and to assess possible upcoming developments. Such meetings take place in the context of regular, more strategic planning of communication priorities, centred both on the Executive Office of the Secretary-General and the United Nations Communications Group, chaired by the Department.

33. The close working relationship between the Department and the two Offices focuses in particular on the formulation and implementation of a coordinated strategy dealing with crisis messaging, the strategic positioning of the Secretary-General and priority issues facing the Organization. Such messaging is conveyed to all the Department's news operations and information centres. The Department's news operations at Headquarters consult with and draw guidance from the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General throughout the day to ensure that United Nations communication outputs accurately reflect the Organization's position on the latest Organization-related developments. In addition, the Department, in coordination with the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General and relevant departments, has systematically developed more detailed messaging and communications guidance on

major issues dealt with by the Organization and ensured the timely dissemination of such information to United Nations Communications Group members, United Nations information centres and other United Nations field offices, as well as to other United Nations media personnel.

34. The Department, in particular United Nations information centres, works closely with the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General and the Executive Office of the Secretary-General to support the Secretary-General during his official visits abroad. UNIC staff provide media and communications support, including media monitoring and liaison with the local press. To ensure that such visits run smoothly, Department of Public Information staff have cooperated with the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General in the development of guidelines for the Department's field staff. In addition, Department and UNIC staff liaise with that Office regarding interview requests from media outlets. The Department's news staff have also on occasion accompanied the Secretary-General on his visits to ensure maximum coverage of the issues before him. For example, a senior television producer and a cameraperson accompanied the Secretary-General during his trip to Asia (China, Japan and the Republic of Korea in July 2008), feeding daily coverage to international and domestic broadcasters as well as to news syndicators.

IV. Publicizing the activities of the General Assembly and cooperation with the Office of the President of the General Assembly

35. The Department has assisted the Office of the President of the General Assembly in the development and maintenance of its website. A comprehensive site based on the President's press kit, also produced by the Department, was developed in the six official languages and launched at the time of the opening of the sixty-third regular session of the General Assembly.

36. The Department provides guidance on web best practices, technical support and troubleshooting to assist the President's Office in the development of new content in English while ensuring ongoing development and maintenance for the other language versions.

37. The Department also prepared and disseminated, in both print and electronic form, a press kit on the President of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session. The press kit, which included a biography and a photograph of the President, as well as material on the upcoming session and on past Presidents of the Assembly, was produced in print form in English, French and Spanish. Electronic versions of the press kit were made available in all official languages to United Nations information centres and distributed to all United Nations associations and to non-governmental organizations related to the Department of Public Information and the Economic and Social Council. They were widely used and adapted for posting on the websites of non-governmental organizations.

38. The Department's Strategic Communications Division worked closely with the Office of the President of the General Assembly to promote the Assembly's high-level events, thematic debates, special sessions and commemorative plenary meetings. The Division has also developed and implemented communications

campaigns on thematic issues as mandated by the Assembly, including in the areas of development, human rights, the question of Palestine, decolonization, gender issues, and peace and security.[1] Various news outlets of the Department also continued to give regular and extensive coverage of the work of the Assembly, including the activities and statements of the President. The Department also loaned a staff member to serve as spokesperson for the President of the General Assembly. Furthermore, as part of its efforts to bring additional media attention to the work of the Assembly and the activities of its President, the Department used the opportunity presented by major news events to set up media stakeouts at the entrance to the General Assembly Hall.

V. Other services

1. Support to the media

39. From 1 July 2008 to 9 January 2009, the Department processed 706 permanent and 2,046 temporary press accreditations and distributed 130 media alerts to 3,700 media organizations, press attachés of Permanent Missions and others in the United Nations system. The Department also conducted 20 tours for groups of students and professional journalists and provided information and logistics assistance for 720 media stake-outs. During that period, 229 press conferences/briefings were held, attended by 5,329 journalists.

40. In order to facilitate the work of the press officers of Member States during periods of heightened security such as the opening of the General Assembly session, the Media Liaison and Accreditation Unit has initiated a badge identification system with the Department of Safety and Security that will allow press officers to move more freely through security checkpoints.

2. Placement of op-ed articles

41. The Department of Public Information continued to assist in the placement of opinion pieces by the Secretary-General and other senior United Nations officials in newspapers and other media outlets around the world. Through the combined efforts of its staff in New York and at United Nations information centres, from June through December 2008 14 op-ed pieces, seven of them by the Secretary-General, were published. The articles, which addressed many of the most urgent challenges facing the international community, appeared in 236 newspapers around the globe, in a wide range of languages. For example, a June 2008 article by the Secretary-General entitled "The Real UN" was carried by 44 newspapers and media outlets worldwide. An op-ed by the Secretary-General timed to coincide with the July 2008 Summit of the Group of Eight, held in Toyako, Japan, was published simultaneously in major newspapers in all eight countries of the Group.

[1] See A/AC.198/2009/2.

3. "Ten stories the world should hear more about"

42. The Department launched its fifth annual list of "Ten stories the world should hear more about" (available at http://www.un.org/events/tenstories/) in March 2008, with the aim of drawing increased media attention to issues worthy of greater exposure. Covering a wide range of international concerns, the 2008 list highlighted issues including conflict situations, crime prevention, food security and the protection of human rights. The "Ten stories" website, in all official languages, drew significant traffic as well as inquiries from the press and the public.

VI. The United Nations website: steady progress

43. The United Nations website achieved an increase of more than 17 per cent in the total number of page views to the website as a whole (www.un.org). The overall number of monthly page views rose from a total of 39,000,000 in 2007 to 45,649,075 in 2008 (see fig. V). The various language sites achieved different growth rates, ranging from 1.5 per cent for the Arabic site to 8 per cent for the English site. Views to the French site rose by 6.8 per cent, while the Chinese, Russian and Spanish sites each registered an increase of 5 per cent. The notable increase overall in the use of the website was, in fact, even greater than the above statistics suggest, as they do not reflect accessing practices such as page caching. Further, the statistics do not take into account the fact that a number of important high-volume days were lost because of a breakdown of the server.

44. Usage of the United Nations website was also adversely affected when the entire site was shut down for a number of days in August 2008, when measures were taken to enhance its security. Another factor affecting year-to-year comparison was the move of the Department of Public Information's multimedia pages to an outside hosting solution to facilitate faster downloads of broadcast-quality files without overloading currently available bandwidth.

45. The continued analysis of website traffic is a critical element in the process of learning more about user preferences and thus catering to their requirements. Robust and sophisticated analysis tools, including real-time traffic monitoring, are essential for effective website management. The Department continues to explore options to meet that need within existing resources in order to better provide users of the United Nations website with the service they seek.

Figure V
Page views and visits to the United Nations website, 2008

1. Multilingualism and parity among languages

46. As part of its responsibilities in terms of providing project-management services for many new and existing sites, the Department is in daily contact with author offices, always emphasizing the need for the content of their websites to be available in all six official languages, in keeping with the resolutions of the General Assembly. There has been notable progress in adding new pages to the website. However, given the fact that far more pages are available in English and that offices are continuingly adding pages in that language, the number of new pages in English is still higher than the number of pages added in the other languages. Unfortunately, therefore, the process of achieving parity among languages remains a difficult challenge. In some areas, progress has been steady, and in key information areas on the website such as news, one of the most visited areas of the site, significant strides have been made in enhancing the multilingual nature of the site.

47. Exemplifying the Department's efforts to achieve parity, the nearly 13,000 new pages created by the Web Services Section in 2008 are fairly evenly spread across all six official languages (see table below). The production of both new and updated web pages was helped by pro bono partnerships with academic institutions:

(a) Zhejiang University in China provided 400 translated pages in Chinese;

(b) Minsk State Linguistic University in Belarus translated 210 pages into Russian;

(c) The Spanish website had a very high number of pages updated, partly as a result of the services of volunteers and interns, and of the work of two teams of faculty and students at the University of Salamanca in Spain, which delivered 1,893 pages translated into Spanish.

48. The quality of the output improved over time as the students working on the translations gained familiarity with United Nations terminology. The Department is continuing to try to enlist the support of an institution of higher learning for pro bono translations into Arabic. Overall, the process of web-page updating is crucial to keeping the United Nations website timely, but the considerable resources required for this effort make the task of achieving linguistic parity even more difficult.

Table
New pages created and pages updated in 2008

	Arabic	*Chinese*	*English*	*French*	*Russian*	*Spanish*[a]
New	2 085	2 568	2 024	2 126	2 101	2 083
Updated	4 525	5 680	5 121	4 642	5 414	10 730

[a] The number of updated pages for the Spanish website is very high because the Spanish Language Unit had the services of a number of volunteers and interns during the course of the year.

49. Additional cost-neutral ways to extend cooperative arrangements with academic institutions for website translation are currently being sought, including various opportunities for financing United Nations internships for student translators, such as using scholarships from the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the Spanish Ministry of Culture. The Department continues to liaise with the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management concerning the possibilities presented by automatic translation in terms of accelerating the processing of news-based and other materials into the official languages.

2. Taking a multimedia approach

50. As the Department continued its efforts to capitalize on the synergies of a truly multimedia approach to the presentation of essential content, its coverage of the general debate of the General Assembly during its sixty-third session offered another illustration of the effectiveness of this approach. The United Nations website pulled together a number of the Department's outputs, including photos, text and video, and created a separate page for each of the participants in the debate, featuring a photo of the speaker taken by United Nations photographers, the video file produced by United Nations Television and the United Nations Webcast Unit, a summary of the speech issued as a press release, and the full text of the statement posted online by a specially set up scanning operation. Statements can now be located by means of an alphabetical list of speakers, in addition to the meeting-by-meeting listing. Usage of the United Nations website was extremely high; during the first three hours of the first day of the general debate (9 a.m. to 12 noon), users around the world viewed more than 240,000 web pages. On that day, a new record was also set for the volume of data transferred from the United Nations website, which reached a total of 101 gigabytes (see also www.unmultimedia.org, which brings together all media on one site).

3. United Nations website enhancement and governance

51. The Department began the task of revamping the top layers of the United Nations website more than a year ago. Initially, the plan had been to launch the redesigned site under a new content-management system. Owing to delays in the identification, planning, procurement and subsequent implementation of such a system, the Department decided to go ahead with the redesign within the current platform. To that end, consultations are ongoing with the Office of Information and Communications Technology on the modernization of the technological infrastructure of the United Nations website.

52. Consultations have also taken place within the Department and with content-providing offices on the basic principles of the redesign. In line with the agreements reached, the top layers of the website in all official languages have been redesigned to present information about the Organization and its various activities in a way that is more coherent, engaging and user-friendly, as well as accessible to people with disabilities. The new design incorporates a common branding element that fits in well with any content style. Improved navigation, related cross-links and colour-coding of groups of pages have been implemented. Users are now able to access content with fewer clicks. Additional areas of the site will be migrated to the new template-driven design in the coming months.

53. In parallel with the revamp, a new companion site for mobile devices is being readied for launch. It is currently being tested for compatibility in all languages. This is part of a wider effort to disseminate material through new forms of technology. The Department is exploring new ways to deliver more content on demand in the form of podcasts and video podcasts (vodcasts) and to make it easier for consumers to share United Nations material with others on social networking sites.

54. A robust and secure content-management system remains vital to the systematic and coordinated enhancement of the United Nations website. Its benefits are highlighted in detail in section VI of the 2007 report of the Secretary-General (A/AC.198/2007/3) and in section VII of the 2008 report (A/AC.198/2008/3). It should be recalled that the General Assembly, in its resolution 63/262, approved $2 million for enterprise content management, including the United Nations Internet site project, and requested the Secretary-General to meet those requirements from within the overall resources appropriated for the biennium 2008-2009. Accordingly, the foundation is being laid for the United Nations website to move to the new system over the course of the next few years.

55. Once a content-management system is in place, a centralized template will ensure organizational branding and lay down specific presentational requirements. The challenge will be to allow for the flexibility and creativity that author offices require to meet the needs of their particular audiences — be they government officials, the media, academia, civil society or the public at large — while also ensuring a unified technical infrastructure, consistency in presentation and organizational branding, as well as fulfilling the dual mandate of producing material in all official languages and addressing accessibility needs. To that end, the Department has worked closely with the Chief Information Technology Officer and the Office of Information and Communications Technology to link the implementation of a content-management system with the adoption of a more robust governance

system that will gradually put in place the policies and standards required for a new environment for web-page generation.

56. The United Nations website is a strategic tool with which the Organization can reach out directly to the peoples of the world. It is therefore important to establish and follow a rational, effective and enforceable governance model that is flexible enough to evolve in response to advances in technology. At the same time, it is also necessary to ensure that technology remains an enabler of the content and responds accordingly.

57. The purpose of web governance is not to discourage or bureaucratize the use of the website as an organizational tool, but to ensure that our decentralized Organization establishes a coherent presence in cyberspace. The objective is to encourage offices to establish their own web pages linked to and consistent with the main United Nations website; establish responsibility and accountability for content on the various sites; achieve a United Nations "look and feel" without over-standardization; and avoid duplication and ensure cost effectiveness in the use of this fast-growing medium.

58. Based on the experience gained during the 13 years that the United Nations website has been in operation, the Department, in consultation with the Chief Information Technology Officer, has proposed the establishment of a two-tier governance mechanism for the website, which has been approved by the Office of the Secretary-General.

59. The highest tier of this two-tier governance mechanism for the United Nations website is the Internet steering committee, established at the level of Under-Secretary-General. The committee is assisted and supported in its functions by the Working Group on Internet Governance, which will oversee the setting of standards and their implementation and will replace the current Working Group on Internet Matters of the Publications Board.

60. The committee will meet quarterly, or on an as-needed basis, to review and approve policies, projects and standards; ensure that content and technical aspects are coordinated and that technology is used as an enabler of content; approve technical and content standards for issuance as administrative instructions and/or Secretary-General's bulletins; ensure that proposals are congruent with programme strategy and are adequately resourced; take final decisions on their implementation; review cases of non-compliance with standards, policies and mandates referred to the committee by the Working Group, and decide on an appropriate course of action to bring about compliance, including attaching a time frame for such compliance and, if necessary, sanctions.

4. Accessibility by persons with disabilities

61. The Department of Public Information continues to ensure that the United Nations website is accessible by persons with disabilities, including visual and hearing disabilities, with a view to making information about the United Nations and its activities available to the widest possible audience. All new web projects are designed to meet accessibility requirements, complying with the World Wide Web Consortium standards, which at present are the only standards with worldwide recognition and acceptance. The additional efforts necessary to create the new pages

and to validate them against the standards have required additional production time, which has increased by at least 20 per cent.

62. As resources permit, older pages are corrected to address accessibility issues. The diagnosis and correction of accessibility barriers in existing pages is a process that is more time-consuming than the creation of new accessible pages. Therefore, the Department has been working to raise awareness of this issue, so that the accessibility factor is taken into account at the initiation of a project.

63. In adopting the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on 13 December 2006 (resolution 61/106), the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to implement progressively standards and guidelines for the accessibility of facilities and services of the United Nations system. To assist departments and offices across the Secretariat in producing accessible web content, a task force has prepared technical standards to build accessible United Nations websites. The draft was shared among web professionals within the Secretariat, accessibility advocacy organizations and other specialized agencies and offices of the United Nations system, such as the International Telecommunication Union and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The final version is now available online at www.un.org/webaccessibility. Based on those standards, the Department has provided advice and expertise to other entities, departments and offices across the United Nations system, including the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Economic Commission for Europe. These standards will be promulgated through the Standards Working Group of the Information and Technology Board.

VII. Capital master plan

64. The Department has undertaken extensive planning, both internally and with key departments upon whose services it depends, to ensure business continuity throughout the period of the capital master plan. Implementation has already begun in some areas, and it is clear that the Organization as a whole, and the Department specifically, face a number of challenges in ensuring the maintenance of the quality service its clients expect.

65. The daily coverage operation for meetings at Headquarters, which involves multiple deadlines and sudden scheduling changes, faces particular challenges. Hourly and daily production and dissemination requirements involving television, radio, text, Internet and photographic services involve a complex nexus of factors such as physical access and adjacency; close liaison with other Departments, such as the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management and the Department of Safety and Security, and dependency on the continuing functioning of broadcast and information technology infrastructure, responsibility for which lies outside the Department.

66. The Department is continuing its intensive discussions with the capital master plan secretariat and other relevant offices to ensure that all coverage teams have ready access to meetings. The staggered relocation of staff to different areas within and outside the complex represents a particular challenge. The Department has worked closely with the relevant departments to ensure that its information technology requirements, in terms of both local networking systems and access to

external clients, via web, cable and satellite feeds, are understood. Anything short of a smooth transfer from present arrangements to new information technology connectivity and setups would have a serious impact on the various production and dissemination operations. Even measures already taken by the Department to ensure reliable service to clients, such as the external hosting of web-based multimedia products, would be affected.

67. Similarly, the Department has stressed the importance of ensuring the close proximity to the Headquarters campus of offices dealing with the external media, including the Office of the Spokesperson of the Secretary-General and the Media Liaison and Accreditation Unit. In addition, it has worked closely with the capital master plan secretariat to ensure the provision of adequate working space for accredited external media, and with the capital master plan and other departments to ensure connectivity to the necessary infrastructure to enable them to maintain coverage of the United Nations.

VIII. Conclusions

68. **Dramatic developments in the world of information and communications technologies and their quick adoption by the Department of Public Information have enabled it to spread the messages of the Organization rapidly and in a cost-effective manner, by means of radio, television and the Internet. The increase in traffic to the United Nations website during the reporting period is a clear indication of its popularity and usefulness. On average, the website registered over a million page views per day. The United Nations News Centre alone attracted an average of nearly one million unique visitors per month in 2008.**

69. **Despite such impressive strides, the Secretariat continues to lag behind in achieving parity among official languages on the United Nations website. While overall progress has been achieved, the growth of English-language content on the website has outpaced that of the site's language versions. With Member States calling for parity among all official languages, the Department of Public Information will continue to work with departments in the Secretariat to turn the United Nations home page into a truly multilingual source of information.**

70. **Another challenge facing the Department is the maintenance of uninterrupted media services during the implementation of the capital master plan. The Department has already made adequate preparations to ensure ready access to meetings by all coverage teams. However, given the complex nature of its Web and multimedia operations, smooth and uninterrupted service will require both vigilance and continued support from all sides.**